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### **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON CO. PAYS \$14 MILLION TO SETTLE THE UNITED STATES' CLAIMS ARISING OUT OF THE 1994 BIG CREEK FOREST FIRE**

FRESNO - United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that Southern California Edison Co. ("SCE") has paid the United States \$14 million to settle a civil lawsuit brought by the government to recover damages arising from the 1994 Big Creek forest fire in the Sierra National Forest.

The Big Creek forest fire ignited on August 24, 1994 near an SCE-owned enclosure containing electrical transformers and switching equipment. The electrical facility, located on the Big Creek river in the Sierra National Forest, is connected to two nearby SCE hydroelectric power plants. The United States' complaint alleged that the fire started when a high-voltage SCE transformer in the enclosure caused an electrical explosion, igniting surrounding vegetation. The United States maintained that SCE was liable for the resulting forest fire. Among other allegations, the United States asserted that SCE failed to comply with vegetation clearance requirements around the enclosure, failed to maintain appropriate animal guards at the enclosure, and failed to maintain working fire suppression equipment near the enclosure rendering SCE employees on scene unable to suppress the fire before it spread widely into adjacent forest areas.

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Kirk E. Sherriff and Kimberly A. Gaab, who handled the case against SCE, the Forest Service mobilized over 2,000 federal, state, and local firefighters, air tanker and helicopter crews, and other personnel to fight the Big Creek forest fire. The fire ultimately burned over 5,600 acres within the Sierra National Forest before it was fully suppressed on September 2, 1994. Although the forest fire repeatedly threatened the town of Big Creek and developments near Huntington Lake, fire crews successfully suppressed the fire without the loss of any life or buildings. The fire nonetheless caused substantial damage to National Forest System lands, including harm to ecological habitat and loss of timber values, and required forest restoration efforts that continue to date. The United States' lawsuit alleged that SCE was liable for fire suppression costs, resource damages to National Forest system lands and other damages resulting from the forest fire.

"Electricity generation is of vital concern in California; so too are our National Forest System lands. It is incumbent upon operators such as Southern California Edison to take the steps necessary to reduce the risk of causing wildfires. This \$14 million settlement strikes an appropriate balance in bringing closure to the highly-destructive 1994 Big Creek forest fire in the Sierra National Forest," stated United States Attorney Scott.

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